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## ART AND PROGRESS

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### A FEDERAL ART COMMISSION

That the House of Representatives should have originated and passed a bill creating a National Commission of the Fine Arts is as astounding as it is gratifying. For a number of years this body of Congress has not only refused to recognize the value of expert advice in matters pertaining to the fine arts, but has persistently opposed every effort to safeguard the Government by this means against egregious blunders. From the first it regarded with undisguised ill-favor the Park Commission plan for the artistic development of Washington, resenting in each instance insistence upon the adoption of certain of its features by those specially interested; and only a year ago it employed its prerogative to render ineffective, through lack of power, a Council of the Fine Arts appointed by President Roosevelt. It has, in fact, been the House of Representatives that has all along blocked legislation of this description. Some telling

object lessons have, however, been given lately and there is reason to believe that the weight of public opinion is beginning to be felt.

The debate that followed the introduction of the bill by Mr. McCall, chairman of the Library Committee of the House of Representatives, on February 9th, was interesting and significant. All the old grievances were brought out and well aired; the old arguments which have proved so long conclusive were presented and found unconvincing; there was some heat, but now and then a glint of humor, and the thing was done. The accumulation of artistic horrors at the National Capital, the difficulties attending service upon statue commissions by members of Congress, and the successful operation of the Art Commission of New York, were all given as reasons conducing to the introduction of the bill as well as arguments in favor of its passage. The objections brought against it were of two kinds—those applying to specific cases, wherein expert advice had not been in accord with the judgment of the objectors, and in general against authorized commissions. In answering these objections Mr. McCall was splendidly supported by Mr. Slayden, of Texas, and Mr. Cooper, of Wisconsin, both of whom displayed not only thorough familiarity with the situation at Washington, but a keen appreciation of the significance of art. "The educational value of real works of art," said Mr. Slayden, "can not be overestimated. If such commissions were more generally distributed throughout this country, if a control of the kind suggested obtained in every city that goes in for artistic development, I think that the minds and morals of the people of the country would be distinctly elevated."

The bill, as it finally passed, authorizes the appointment, by the President, of a permanent Commission of the Fine Arts, to be composed of seven artists of repute, who shall serve without compensation for a period of four years. The duty of this Commission shall be to advise in the selection of models for statues and monuments to be erected under the authority

of the United States, and the selection of artists for the execution of the same, and generally to advise upon questions of art when required by the President or by any committee of either house of Congress. It shall, furthermore, have authority to decide upon the location of statues and monuments in the streets and public squares of the District of Columbia. To cover expenses incident to meetings and clerical service an annual appropriation not exceeding \$6,000 is made.

This gives considerable latitude, and if the Commission is wisely chosen its influence might be great. It has, however, it will be noted, little or no authority, and its advice may or may not be followed at pleasure. If such a commission is formed with the honest desire of seeking guidance all will be well, but if not, it would be worse than profitless. It is to be taken for granted, though, that a commission created by Congress and appointed by the President would be duly authorized and loyally upheld. But as yet the commission is not an accomplished fact. The bill passed by the House of Representatives is under consideration by the Senate and if amended must be returned for further action. Many changes may be made and some months pass before its fate is determined. Meanwhile attention may be called to the fact that the need inspiring this proposed act is felt in other parts of the country, Washington not having the monopoly of artistic aberrations. Not long ago Illinois established a State Art Commission; within the last few weeks a bill with this object in view has been introduced into the Legislature of Massachusetts; and, according to report, Philadelphia, Buffalo, and other cities are urging the appointment of authorized Art Commissions.

### NEW PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

That a vital interest in art is today awakening in America none can doubt who has, for even the past few months, watched the current of activity. North, south, east, and west evidence of increas-

ing appreciation and desire for knowledge have been demonstrated. The American Federation of Arts, in December, assembled and sent to Fort Worth, Texas, an exhibition of forty or more paintings by prominent American artists which was set forth in the Public Library of that town. Over five thousand persons visited this exhibition; one picture, a marine by Paul Dougherty, was purchased for a permanent public collection, and an art association was formed by representatives of four Texas cities with the purpose of co-operating in the future in obtaining similar exhibits. The pictures shown in Fort Worth were sent, the latter part of January, to New Orleans, where, for a fortnight, they were shown in the Newcomb College Art Gallery in connection with the annual exhibition of the New Orleans Art Association. There, again, a purchase was made for a permanent collection, the choice in this instance being Robert Henri's painting "A Spanish Gipsy Girl," and on the last day of the exhibition a public-spirited citizen gave \$150,000 for the erection of a public art gallery, the city furnishing the site. From New Orleans some of these pictures were sent to St. Paul, where, supplemented by others, they were set forth under the auspices of the Minnesota State Art Association, which will send them on to Minneapolis and New Ulm, in which cities effort is likewise being made to assemble permanent collections. And what is more, these are not isolated instances. Meadville, Pennsylvania, is accumulating an excellent collection by making purchases from year to year. Five cities of Indiana are doing the same thing, selecting from a traveling exhibit, organized by Mrs. M. F. Johnston. Watertown, New York, set an example some years ago; Denver, Colorado, has an Artists' Club which spends \$1,000 a year in a purchase; cities in the south are seeking exhibitions and guaranteeing their cost. And it is interesting to observe that in many instances the Public Libraries are providing the exhibition galleries and serving as distributing centers, bringing about an alliance of art and literature which is bound to be beneficial.